

**Director's Report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission**  
**May 2-3, 2008**  
***"A Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife"***

We serve Washington's citizens by protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE GOAL:**

***Achieve healthy, diverse and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and their supporting habitats***

**ESA Status Review of Eulachon Smelt Warranted** – The National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) recently determined that action on the petition by the Cowlitz Tribe to list eulachon smelt below the Canadian border might be warranted.

The listing could impact fisheries, possibly to the extent of eliminating harvest. The Columbia River smelt commercial fishery consists of a mainstem gillnet fishery and a tributary dipnet fishery. The recreational dipnet fishery is particularly important to the communities of Longview and Kelso. Both sport and commercial fisheries provides fresh fish for human consumption and bait. When substantial landings are obtained, the commercial fishery also provides frozen smelt to aquariums for marine mammal feed. These commercial fisheries, and the sport dipnet fishery, are conducted without any significant interaction with other commercial or sport fishing opportunities.

From a habitat perspective, the tributaries of the lower Columbia River, and the lower Columbia mainstem may become locations where wintertime activities (such as dredging) are further curtailed. The duration that smelt are in fresh water is short, with adults arriving and spawning in December-March, and larvae drifting down river a month or so after spawning occurs (late January-early May).

To this end, NMFS is soliciting information for a status review. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) will be approaching the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to develop a joint data response before the May 12<sup>th</sup> deadline. Department staff from Region 5 will be Washington's lead contact with NMFS on this matter.

**Opener for Swift Reservoir Delayed Until May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008** - The opening of trout season on Swift Reservoir in Skamania County is being delayed for a month due to the abnormally slow melting of the heavy snow pack in the basin. Spring inflows have yet to occur, resulting in unusually low water levels on the uppermost Lewis River reservoir.

Currently the reservoir is down about 82 feet below full pool. It needs to raise another 55 feet before the boat ramp is available for use. Current conditions make it difficult to provide a quality fishing opportunity for the public. Access, whether from shore or a boat, would be extremely limited and unsafe.

The 60,000 catchable rainbow trout scheduled for the opener will be held at Speelyai Hatchery for the later opener. They will be planted the week before Memorial Day weekend. The trout will get a chance for additional growth and will be more readily available to the angling public once the reservoir water level comes back to normal.

**Juvenile Pinto Abalone Outplant Study** - The Central Shellfish Dive Team completed surveys of a juvenile pinto abalone outplant study at four sites in Freshwater Bay. This is the culmination of a one-year study to determine the growth, survival and feasibility of outplanting hatchery-raised juvenile abalone as a restoration strategy for recovering pinto abalone populations in Washington. Two hundred and eighty-one juveniles from the WDFW/UW experimental abalone hatchery at the NOAA Mukilteo Field Station were individually tagged and divided equally between the four sites in Freshwater Bay, Strait of Juan de Fuca. Tag retention was exceptional, with only two examples of tag loss recorded during the study. The initial introduction occurred on March 18, 2007. Five surveys followed the initial outplanting (at 2 days, 2 weeks, 2 months, 6 months, and 1 year) over the course of the study.

Data from this study will be finalized and published in a peer-reviewed journal. With the increased support provided by WDFW Fish Program towards abalone recovery efforts, combined with impressive hatchery successes from our 2007 spawning attempts, it is the goal of the Central Shellfish Dive Team to run this study on a larger scale (x10) in 2009.

This work was the result of collaborations with the University of Washington, NOAA Mukilteo Field Station, and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, with additional funding provided by the SeaDoc Society and the NOAA Species of Concern Program.

Finally, we would like to recognize the efforts of staff at Lake Aberdeen and Humptulips hatcheries, and special mention for Elma Game Club members operating the Satsop Springs facilities where the quality trout are reared. This effort was well received by local anglers, and generated a lot of positive feelings. Well done.

**Nooksack Elk Capture** - During a one-and-a-half day helicopter darting operation, a joint WDFW-tribal capture crew successfully captured and radiocollared 11 Nooksack elk. The capture crew was led by staff and Wildlife's veterinarian. This was the first helicopter-assisted wildlife capture operation WDFW has undertaken since recently adopting new revised flight safety procedures and formalized flight safety training. The 11 elk captured consisted of 7 adult cows and 4 adult bulls. Nine elk (7 cows and 2 bulls) were fitted with GPS-equipped radiocollars, and 2 bulls were fitted with VHF radiocollars. This effort was in support of ongoing collaborative work to assess the demographics and dynamics of the Nooksack elk herd and better understand their use of the landscape in northwest Washington.

**Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse Activities** - Wildlife biologists finished a 2-week project to translocate sharp-tailed grouse from north-central Utah (n = 22) and southeastern Idaho (n = 20) to Washington. The target locations for the release of birds included West Foster Creek Wildlife Area (7 males and 7 females), Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (7 males and 7 females), and the Colville Indian Reservation (7 males and 7 females). The translocation effort also incorporated the moving of birds to release sites in northeastern Oregon and south central Idaho. Participants

in the project included approximately 40 individuals from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Utah Department of Natural Resources, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Colville Confederated Tribes.

**Wooten Wildlife Area Revegetation Completed** - Wildlife staff oversaw the completion of the huge replanting effort on the Wooten Wildlife Area. After a month-plus of intense effort, the last of 540,000 trees and shrubs were planted, revegetating key portions of the wildlife area that was burnt in the 2005 School Fire.

**Washington Department of Natural Resources Wind Power Proposal** - The Washington Department of Natural Resources has issued a SEPA Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) for the proposed leasing for wind power on 39 DNR-managed (Common School Trust) parcels totaling approximately 19,532 acres for wind power development(s) in eastern Yakima County. It is anticipated these parcels would be incorporated into larger surrounding projects. If the state DNR parcels are included in these projects, the amount of state ownership will depend on the total project size and the number of turbines placed on state ownership within the projects. DNR has made the same DNS for Columbia, Walla Walla, and Garfield counties totaling an additional 20,000 acres. The DNR is conducting four separate SEPA processes with a Determination of Non-significance for each action. Cumulatively, these actions relate to the lease of all or parts of more than 87 sections of land totaling 39,377 acres for wind power development. The SEPA determinations are for the lease only and not the actual development of the land and are deemed non-project actions. However, the act of making these lands available for wind power development, a use that is known to have potential significant adverse environmental effects, and on or adjacent to lands known to support listed and sensitive species and critical habitat and connectivity between critical habitat blocks, suggests that a Determination of Significance and an Environmental Impact Statement is appropriate. In collaboration with Major Project Staff in the Wind Power Division, Region 3 is recommending that a Determination of Significance be issued for this wind power proposal.

**Rock Crawling Project Proposals** - Region 3 Habitat Program has reviewed two recent project proposals for development of Rock Crawling Courses and events that may attract several thousand spectators. One location for a Rock Crawling event is proposed on private shrub-steppe land in Kittitas County adjacent to a WDFW Wildlife Area, and another location is proposed on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFS) land near Rimrock Lake. There is concern that uncontrolled and dispersed camping and ORV use associated with these events will occur in both areas resulting in impacts to habitat, fish and wildlife species, public health, water quality, and risk of fire. Neither the county nor USFS has current funding for adequate policing of these areas during the events. We have provided comment regarding the need to address and mitigate the likely environmental impacts. This is apparently a new and growing sport and there have been some significant concerns with activities associated with such events in other states and on federal lands.

**Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Land Acquisition Grant Program** - The Heart of the Cascades, Phase I project in Kittitas County, of Region 3 was awarded partial funding for acquisition of critical habitat in the Rock Creek Sub-basin of the Naches River Watershed. Grant applications are being submitted for the remainder of the funding for this area. This project

would conserve biodiversity at the landscape scale by helping resolve the checkerboard ownership pattern challenges in the Central Cascades. This grant funding would acquire 10,370 acres of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir mixed conifer, and riparian habitats in the Rock Creek drainage along the Naches River. Benefits are expected for the northern spotted owl, bull trout, grizzly bear, gray wolf, Canada lynx, and a number of unlisted fish and wildlife species.

**Accord Reached in Buckhorn Gold Mine Controversy** - An accord was reached between conservation groups and mining interests that ended an 18-year effort to stop the development of a large gold mine on Buckhorn Mountain in northcentral Washington State. By negotiating the agreement signed by both mining opponents and the company that will build the mine, Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA) was able to achieve proactive environmental protections beyond those required by federal and state agencies. With the signing of the agreement, the groups withdrew previous appeals in exchange for verifiable, independent monitoring and increased mitigation. Despite significant changes to the rejected proposed open-pit mine from the 1990s, grave concerns remain about the current underground mine proposal. The settlement allows the parties to track these concerns and minimize the impacts of the mine. Key parts of the settlement with the mining company focus on improved monitoring and mitigation. High-points include: maintenance of the natural water levels for headwater creeks on Buckhorn Mountain, protection for residents worried about their wells, additional wetland and stream improvement projects in the Okanogan Highlands, and third-party monitoring with independent verification and annual audits of monitoring results. A history and timeline of the project can be found at: <http://www.okanoganhighlands.org/about/timeline>

**Lynx** - The Forest Habitat Section staff has been working closely with the Wildlife Program and Department of Natural Resources to address impacts to lynx that may result from current and future proposed timber sales within Okanogan County. Forest fires that have occurred within the recent past have burned approximately half of the lynx habitat within Okanogan County. WDFW and USFWS have relied on Okanogan County as a source for the remaining lynx population, as this is the only area in Washington State that currently has successful reproduction occurring. WDFW is working with DNR to develop some mitigation measures that can be applied to future timber sales to supplement their current lynx habitat management plan that was adopted prior to the Tripod Complex fire.

#### **PUBLIC GOAL:**

***Ensure sustainable fish and wildlife opportunities for social and economic benefit.***

**Spring Break Trout Openers** - For 2008, an effort began to provide a lake fishing opportunity for local anglers during local school districts' spring break, and to increase interest in early season lake fishing opportunities in Grays Harbor County.

Duck Lake, Lake Sylvia and Vance Creek Pond #1, located in Grays Harbor County, were planted with both catchable-size rainbows and "quality" trout. Catchable size trout are 10 – 12 inches in length, and weigh approximately ¼ pound each when released. "Quality" trout are fish given to a local group (Elma Game Club) at catchable size. The group rears these trout for an additional year, to a size of 4 to 6 pounds each, and releases them into local area lakes. Some fish are not released after the first year, and are reared an additional year prior to release. These

very large fish are usually more than 10 pounds each, and are really tackle testers. These fish (along with the Department's own Triploids released under the Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission direct control) are high quality fish that really energize the local angling scene.

**2008 Kline Pond Kid's Fishing Event – Region 5** - Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, was the best event in nine years! Approximately 1,230 kids attended, 130 volunteers participated and over 10,000 fish were stocked. It was a little slow fishing in the first two sessions, but picked up for the rest of the day and almost all the kids caught at least one fish. The largest fish caught was 20" and that child was awarded the G. Loomis Rod and Reel as a prize.

The weather was beautiful and the families had a lot of fun. On Friday before the event, a group of autistic children participated because they could not be with the larger Saturday group. They are learning about fishing in their classes and were able to apply what they learned at the lake. These kids had a great time and were surprised to learn they got to take the fishing poles home.

At the end of the day when the nets were pulled, the public got to fish and they were very happy as well. Many thanks to the hatchery and enforcement staff who helped make this a success.

**North Bay Clam Population Survey** - A cooperative state/tribal clam population survey was performed at North Bay agency tidelands on Case Inlet with staff from the Squaxin Island Tribe. This is the third year this survey has been performed with a state/tribal crew. Signs of a significant "winter kill" of Manila clams were present throughout the entire beach, with many freshly dead shells evident. Many moribund Manila clams were also noted on or near the surface. However, the density of live clams still appears high. Winter kills result from freezing temperatures and cold winds during nighttime low tides that damage the clams' gill tissues. This damage can take several months to play out before the full extent of the mortality is evident. Manila clams are particularly susceptible to winter kills as they are native to a warmer Asian climate and are not adapted for our winters. Laboratory analysis of samples and results of the survey will be completed in the late summer. Clam population surveys are conducted annually in order to set fishing quotas for the state and tribes.

**Bob Oke Game Farm** - The damage repair to the Bob Oke Game Farm game flight pens has been completed. December 2007 flood events destroyed a majority of the flight pens. Capital, Planning, and Facilities Management construction crews, in cooperation with local volunteers, have removed debris and rebuilt the pens to accommodate this fall's western Washington pheasant release population.

**Falconry** - Six of an available eight permits were issued to Master Falconers for the annual peregrine take of nestlings or fledglings. This is the fifth year of take as authorized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) since the species was federally delisted by the USFWS and state downlisted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

**SCIENCE GOAL:**

*Promote development and responsible use of sound and objective science to inform decision-making.*

**2008 Science Division Meeting** - Planning is well underway for the 2008 Science Division meeting. This year the meeting will be held on October 15 and 16 at the Thurston County Fairgrounds. We are very excited about the new venue. Besides being cleaner and less expensive than the Millersylvania facility, it will also allow us to have more people attending. We think this year's topics—hatchery reform and harvest reform—will attract quite a bit of interest. Big changes have occurred and will continue to occur in how we produce hatchery salmon and steelhead, and in how we harvest them. Developing a broad understanding of these differences is critical to our understanding of how our work efforts fit into the salmon recovery effort. There may also be presentations on harvest of marine fish. In addition to the traditional two-day program, the Science Division will also offer some short courses the day before. The details have not been entirely worked out yet, but at minimum we will be offering short courses in statistics.

**Cougars and Teaching** - An article on the Project CAT work of the Cle Elum-Roslyn School District was published in National Science Teachers Association's *The Science Teacher* journal. The article entitled "Cougars and the Community" describes the process teachers use to facilitate student investigation of human wildlife relationships through field investigation and civic participation. The full article is accessible on <M:\WP\Diversity\p36-40ryken.pdf>

**Lewis County Demonstration Project Funding Secured** - Funding was secured for WDFW to conduct a local habitat assessment/watershed characterization in support of a sub-area economic development project in Lewis County. WDFW and Ecology staff presented to the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (the coordinating agency) an overview of the wildlife habitat and ecosystem process characterization tools that will be used in the project. The characterizations will help direct economic development to those locations best suited for development while protecting the most important habitat and landscape process support areas. One intention of the project is to use development rights trading and other incentive measures to make the planning process equitable for landowners.